



Testimony in support of HB 5037  
*An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023*  
Appropriations Committee, February 23, 2022

AARP Connecticut's mission is to empower people to choose how they live as they age, and an important component of choosing *how* to live as you age is choosing *where* to live as you age. An overwhelming majority of older adults – 81% of older adults in Connecticut, according to one recent survey – indicate that if they ever need to receive long-term care, they want to receive it in their own home. We would like to express our support for the new investments in home and community-based services (HCBS) that are included in HB 5037.

The Governor's budget reflects the Department of Social Services' plan to use the temporary 10% increase in the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) that was included in the American Rescue Plan Act. DSS's plan focuses on expanding access to home and community-based services through new services such as The Care of Persons with Dementia in their Environments (COPE), Care for the Caregiver (Care4Caregiver), and Community Aging in Place – Advancing Better Living for Elders (CAPABLE).

Family caregivers are the backbone of Connecticut's long-term care system. Our state's 460,000 family caregivers provide an estimated 390 million hours of care to their loved ones each year.<sup>1</sup> As more people choose to remain in the community as they age, and as more older adults experience increasing comorbidity, family caregivers are taking on increasingly complex medical and support needs in the home, and they are reporting higher levels of physical strain, emotional stress, and loneliness.<sup>2</sup> Two of the programs that DSS plans to implement with ARPA funding, COPE and Care4Caregiver, specifically address caregiver well-being. Providing support to family caregivers can reduce caregiver stress and ultimately delay or prevent care recipients from becoming institutionalized. We strongly support expanding services to better address caregiver needs.

AARP Connecticut also strongly supports state implementation of CAPABLE, which is an evidence-based environmental adaptation program. The CAPABLE program will improve safety and independence by making improvements to a long-term care recipient's home environment. This program has been shown to both improve health outcomes and reduce costs,<sup>3</sup> and, importantly, it gives program participants the opportunity to self-identify needed improvements in their own homes. CAPABLE, which was developed at the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing and operates at more than 40 sites throughout the United States, receives financial support from the AARP Foundation.

The Governor's budget also shows an increase of \$5,928,477 for the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders. This program serves Connecticut residents over the age of 65 who need assistance with activities of daily living such as bathing, eating, and toileting, and it helps older

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<sup>1</sup> AARP Public Policy Institute: <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2019/11/valuing-the-invaluable-2019-update-charting-a-path-forward.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00082.001.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving: <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states-01-21.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Johns Hopkins School of Nursing: [https://nursing.jhu.edu/faculty\\_research/research/projects/capable/](https://nursing.jhu.edu/faculty_research/research/projects/capable/)

adults remain safely in the community instead of needing to go into a nursing home. AARP Connecticut is pleased to see this additional investment and hopes that it will be used to support more individuals who wish to remain in their homes or community. One of our volunteers, Jean of Old Saybrook, provided this statement about what the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders meant to her and her family:

“Having my Mom in the CT Home Care Program for Elders for several years until she was 96 was a gift to both me and to her. It enabled her to stay in her home where she felt most comfortable. It provided me with the peace of mind that she was well cared for and safe. For health reasons, we had to move her to a nursing home a few months before she died, and she was not as comfortable as she was at home. I am so glad that she had those many years to enjoy feeling happy and connected to her community.”

We thank the Governor and the Department of Social Services for their ongoing commitment to rebalancing initiatives and serving more individual in home and community-based settings. We recognize the time-limited nature of ARPA and hope that lawmakers will continue their support beyond this three-year period, with an ongoing cost to the state is estimated to be approximately \$25 million beginning in FY 2025.

While we are very pleased with the historic HCBS investments in this budget, we would be remiss to not mention our ongoing concerns about Connecticut’s critical long-term care workforce shortage. The median direct care wage of \$12.80/hour in the United States (\$13.62/hour in Connecticut) in 2020 places more than 45% of the direct care workforce below 200% of the federal poverty level<sup>4</sup> with about 49% of the direct care workforce relying on some form of public assistance.<sup>5</sup> The lack of a well-trained direct care workforce, combined with an estimated 80% growth of the U.S. 65+ population between 2020 and 2040, points to an emerging crisis that needs immediate attention.<sup>6</sup> Low wages are often seen as an overarching contributor to low recruitment and high staff turnover, and AARP supports efforts to bring wages to levels that will attract workers, contribute to retention, and create a more stable long-term care workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support and comments regarding HB 5037.

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<sup>4</sup> The Gerontologist: <https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/61/4/497/5898205>

<sup>5</sup> PHI: <https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/phi-facts-3.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Urban Institute: <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/program-retirement-policy/projects/data-warehouse/what-future-holds/us-population-aging>